YOUR Health

Los Angeles County Department of Health Services • Public Health

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Food Safety Practices Prevent Illness

The phrase summer cooking conjures the most delicious thoughts: kabobs on the grill, potato salad, and that special family dish with the secret sauce only you know how to make. But any picnic, barbeque or beach excursion can go sour quickly if someone comes down with food poisoning.

Food poisoning, also known as foodborne illness, can occur after eating food contaminated by viruses, bacteria, and parasites. Common symptoms of food poisoning include diarrhea, abdominal cramps, dehydration, vomiting and fever. Most of the problems result from food getting cold when it was supposed to stay warm, or from undercooking foods such as chicken and meat. Food poisoning can be easily prevented with a little preparation. Before you start to cook, remember these simple rules:

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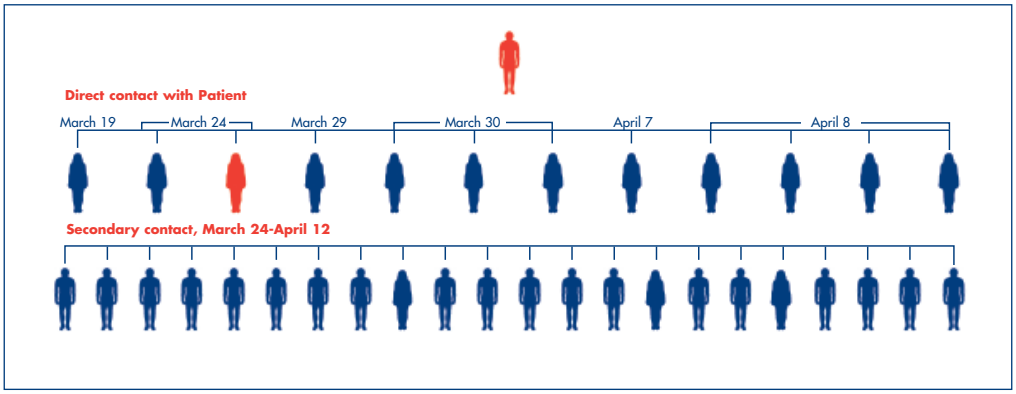
The More You Know: Save Lives, Learn Your HIV Status

HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) is the virus that causes AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome). HIV infects and eventually kills the cells in the body, called "T cells", that fight infection and disease. HIV can be passed through blood, semen, vaginal fluid, or from mother to child during pregnancy, birth, and/or breast feeding. The most common causes of HIV infection are unprotected sex with a HIV-infected partner and sharing a needle or syringe (to inject drugs) with someone infected with HIV.

A recent small outbreak of HIV in the heterosexual adult film industry illustrates the risks of unprotected sex. In March, one recently infected HIV-positive male actor engaged in unprotected intercourse with 14 female actors during filming over a three-week period for the local adult film industry. Three of the women were infected and nearly 50 people placed at risk for infection with HIV (see chart below). Voluntary routine testing of heterosexual adult industry performers prevented the further spread of HIV among these performers and their professional and personal sexual contacts.

Testing alone was not enough to stop this small outbreak of HIV transmission among persons engaging in unprotected, high-risk sexual intercourse. So while the best way to prevent the spread of HIV from sexual contact begins with knowing your HIV status and the status of your sexual partners, you must also take measures to protect yourself.

The ABC's of how to avoid HIV are: A, Abstinence; B, if you are not abstinent, Be monogamous; and C, use a Condom during all sexual intercourse. In addition, D, Don't use injection drugs or have sex while high on drugs or alcohol.



To find free HIV screening near you, call 800-367-AIDS (800-367-2437) or visit the HIV L.A. web site at Prevent-HIV.com.

How is the Air Up There?

How do you judge how clean the air outside is? If you're like many people, you check to see how clear the sky is, or what the "visibility" is like.

While visibility can tell you something about the levels of certain types of pollutants in the air- namely particulate pollutants- it doesn't provide a complete picture of air quality. Certain types of pollutants like ozone and carbon monoxide have little effect on visibility; very high concentrations of these gases can be present even on the clearest day.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has created a better indicator of air quality, the Air Quality Index, or AQI. The AQI is calculated based on the levels of five major pollutants in the air: ground-level ozone, particle pollution, carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, and nitrogen dioxide. Monitors at more than a thousand locations across the country record the concentrations of these pollutants each day. These measurements are used to calculate AQI values for each of the individual pollutants as well as an overall AQI for the day.

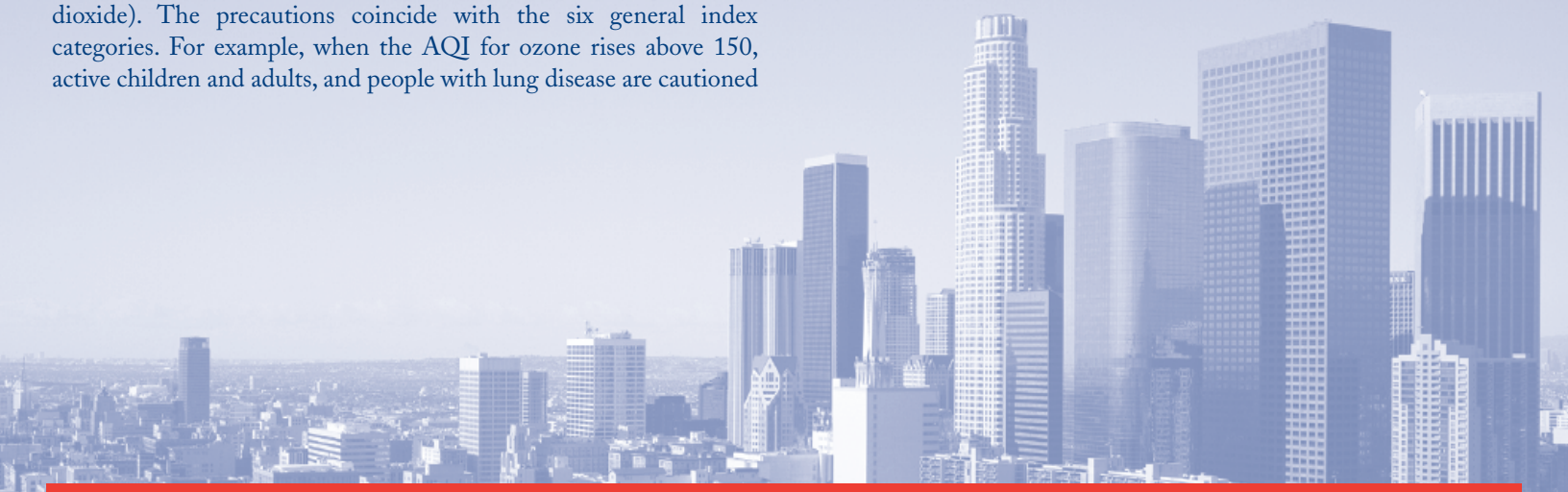
The Air Quality Index runs from 0 to 500: the larger the number, the greater the level of air pollution. To make it easier to use, the index is broken down into six general categories- each category corresponds to a different level of health concern. When the air quality index value is between 101 and 150, for example, air quality is considered to be "unhealthy for sensitive groups" such as people with heart or lung disease; when the value rises to above 200, air quality is considered "very unhealthy" or "hazardous" for the entire population. (To further simplify its use, each of the six categories is color-coded).

But, knowing what the air quality is doesn't protect you against the harmful effects of air pollution. That's why the EPA developed a set of warnings for each of the individual pollutants (except nitrogen dioxide). The precautions coincide with the six general index categories. For example, when the AQI for ozone rises above 150, active children and adults, and people with lung disease are cautioned to avoid prolonged or heavy exertion outdoors; when the AQI for sulfur dioxide rises about 300, children and people with heart or lung disease are encouraged to remain indoors. A complete set of recommendations can be found in the U.S. EPA's publications, Air Quality Index: A Guide to Air Quality and Your Health; the publication is available online at www.epa.gov/airnow/aqibroch.

The Air Quality Index

AQI	Color	Meaning
0 to 50	Green	Good
51 to 100	Yellow	Moderate
101 to 150	Orange	Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups*
151 to 200	Red	Unhealthy
201 to 300	Purple	Very unhealthy
301 to 500	Maroon	Hazardous

** Groups that are unusually sensitive to air pollution include individuals with heart and lung disease, children and older adults.*



The Air Quality Index for the South Coast Basin (which includes Los Angeles County) is posted daily in many of the local newspapers (it usually runs alongside the weather forecast). It can also be found on the Environmental Protection Agency's Web site: http://www.epa.gov/airnow/where/california.html.

Food safety Practices:

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Wash Hands, Rise Foods

- Before preparing food, wash your hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and hot water. Wash them again after touching raw meat, poultry, or seafood.
- Wash fresh fruits and vegetables under running water before you leave your house.

Cook Thoroughly

- Cook meat and poultry thoroughly. Meat juices should be clear when cut open. Never eat your burger "rare."
- Use a food thermometer. Also called meat thermometer, these devices can be purchased at any nearby drugstore. Thermometers take the guess work out of cooking and ensure the foods internal temperature is high enough to kill bacteria Poultry should reach 170°F, beef and veal should reach 145°F, and pork should reach 160°F.

Separation

- Separate raw meats and poultry from other foods such as fruits and vegetables. Use separate cutting boards and platters for these foods, or wash thoroughly with soap and warm water in between uses.
- Keep raw foods away from cooked foods. Do not use the same plate or try for raw and cooked meats. Use different utensils for raw and cooked foods.

Storage

- Keep meats, salads and perishable foods in the refrigerator until you are ready to use them.
- Keep cold foods cold. Pack your cooler with plenty of ice and make sure foods are nestled directly against it. Keep the temperature below 40°F.
- Keep the cooler lid closed as much as possible. Store your cooler in the shade, away from birds and animals.
- Refrigerate leftovers if they are not going to be eater within two hours and throw foods out that should have been kept cold rather than bring it home after an afternoon outside.

After Cooking

- Place cooked food on a clean plate or tray.
- Don't use leftover sauce or marinade from the raw food on cooked food.
- Eat food as soon as it is ready.
- Keep all food covered.
- Reheat leftovers to 165°F before eating. Eat leftovers within two days.

Recommendations for Fish Consumption During Pregnancy

Fish is an important part of a healthy diet because it contains high levels of protein and nutrients, and is low in fat. Fish also includes oils (Omega-3 fatty acids), which are known to be beneficial to the development of fetal brain and other vital organs. Additionally, studies suggest that these nutrients may help protect against preterm delivery and low birth weight. However, nearly all fish also contain trace amounts of mercury. In fact, some fish contain higher levels of mercury, which can be harmful to the health of an unborn baby or young child's developing nervous system.

Pregnant women, women who might become pregnant, nursing mothers and young children should eat fish that are lower in mercury while avoiding certain types of fish. The federal government recommends that Albacore tuna should not be eater more than once a week (6oz.), and shark, swordfish, king mackerel and tilefish, which contain high levels of mercury, should not be eaten at all by women of childbearing age and young children. Furthermore, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recently issued a joint warning suggesting that pregnant women and young children eat no more than 12 ounces a week of a variety of low-mercury fish. Some fish low in mercury are canned light tuna, shrimp, salmon, pollock and catfish. If these recommendations are followed, women and young children will not only experience the health benefits of eating fish, but will also reduce their risk of being exposed to larger amounts of mercury.

Don't worry if you are a pregnant woman and have eaten more than the FDA recommends for a week. The most important thing to remember is to eat the recommended types of fish an average of 12 ounces a week. There is no harm in eating more than 12 ounces of fish in one week as long as it is not a habit. For example, if you have eaten 18 ounces of fish in one week, you should consider eating 6 ounces or less in the following week.

For information about the risks of mercury in seafood call the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) toll-free hotline 24 hours a day at 1 (888) SAFEFOOD, or visit the FDA's Food Safety Website, www.cfsan.fda.gov

*How Does Mercury Get Into Fish? **

Mercury occurs naturally in the environment and it can also be released into the air from industrial sources. Mercury falls from the air and can get into surface water, accumulating in streams and oceans. Bacteria in the water cause chemical changes that transform mercury into methylmercury, which can be toxic. Fish absorb methylmercury from water as they feed on aquatic organisms.

* from a Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Consumer Advisory at http:///ym.cfsan.fda.gove/~dms/admehg.html

Ask the Public Health Nurse

Q: What is the best way to protect myself from sunburn? What is the difference between SPF 4, 6, 8, 15, and 45?

A: Not that long ago, baby oil was as common at the beach as bikinis. But times have changed. Today, the average person uses sunscreens with a variety of sun protection factors (SPFs) ranging from 15 to 50. SPF blocks the sun's damaging rays and reduces the risk of skin cancer. Although many people use sunscreen, most do not apply it correctly, increasing the risk of sunburn and other negative effects of sun exposure. The American Cancer Society recommends using a sunscreen with a sun protection factor of at least 15 or higher Twenty minutes before going out in the sun, adults should use a palmful of sunscreen to cover their arms, legs, neck, and face.

Applied properly, a sunscreen with an SPF of 30 blocks out all but one-thirtieth of the sun's burning rays, allowing people to stay out in the sun 30 times longer than they normally would be able to without burning. But when the sunscreen is applied too thinly, the sun protection can be as little as half of the SPF factor listed on the bottle.

To get the most sun protection and reduce your risk of skin cancer, experts recommend the following tips when using sunscreen:

- Apply sunscreen about 20 minutes before heading outdoors and reapply about 20 minutes after being in the sun.
- Reapply sunscreen every two hours or more often and immediately after swimming or sweating heavily. Sunscreen usually wipes off when you towel off.
- Waterproof sunscreens are tested to last for up to 80 minutes and should be reapplied at regular intervals if you're in the water for prolonged periods of time. Sunscreens labeled as "water resistant" should be reapplied every 40 minutes.
- Don't forget to apply sunscreen to the ears, back of the neck, and exposed areas of the scalp. Sunscreen sprays and sticks can be helpful in reaching these often forgotten areas.
- Both men and women are most likely to get sun-related skin cancers on their nose because it gets the most sun exposure, which makes it a prime target for sunscreen.
- Foundations, face powders, or other types of makeup that contain sunscreen aren't likely to offer as much SPF protection as indicated on the label because they aren't applied thickly enough. You'll get better protection by using a separate product like a moisturizer containing a high SPF.
- Ingredients in sunscreen products can lose potency over time. If you notice that the product has changed color, dried up, or changed consistency, it's better to throw it away.
- If you experience skin irritation from using sunscreen, try one of the newer, chemical-free sunscreens containing zinc oxide or titanium dioxide. These new formulations reflect the sun's damaging rays but don't react with the skin. They can also safely be used around the eyes without causing stinging if the product gets into the eyes after sweating or swimming.

Remember:

- The lighter-skinned you are, the higher the SPF you should use. Still, even if you're as pasty as the Pillsbury Doughboy, you should be fine with SPF 15 as long as you reapply it every two hours or so.
- UVA, UVB: UB confused? Don't fret. Sunlight emits two types of ultraviolet (UV) rays harmful to human skin. UVB rays are the primary cause of sunburn and skin cancer. UVA rays are somewhat weaker, but still destructive. Guard against both with a "broad spectrum" product containing benzophenones, oxybenzone, sulisobenzone, titanium dioxide, zinc oxide, or Parsol 1789.
- PABA has been a basic sun protection ingredient for many years. Unfortunately, it can stain clothes and may cause allergic reactions. It works, but there are PABA-free alternatives that are just as effective, such as the ones listed above.
- Sunblock or sunscreen? It doesn't matter which you choose. Both work well but in different ways. Sunscreens chemically absorb UV rays so not as many reach your skin; sunblocks physically deflect them.
- Creams, gels, lotions, wax sticks, or ointments? None have been proven more effective than any other, so use whatever you're most comfortable with on your skin.
- Cheap or chic? Expensive doesn't mean better. You may prefer the smell or feel of more expensive products, but you won't get better protection.

And last, what if you burn anyway? Treat yourself with cool baths, moisturizers with only mild ingredients or over-the-counter hydrocortisone creams.

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DHS Communications
241 N. Figueroa Street, Room 348
Los Angeles, CA 90012
213/240-8144 • Fax 213/481-1406
www.ladhs.org